

SKOKIE, IL (August 11, 2010) – Today Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), joined Chicago and Illinois leaders, dignitaries, Holocaust survivors, diplomats and other Members of Congress at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie to mark the recent announcement by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that the U.S. government would invest \$15 million in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation in Poland. The money will go toward preserving and maintaining the site of one of the most notorious death camps of the Holocaust. The grant, which will be paid out over five years beginning in 2012, will help protect the Auschwitz-Birkenau site as a museum and historical site of conscience, thereby preserving the memory of the Holocaust.

"As a Jewish American, I feel deeply the importance of preserving the Auschwitz-Birkenau site in Poland," said Schakowsky, whose Congressional District includes the Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie. "It is essential that we preserve that terrible place – where the systematic murder of Jews occurred during the Holocaust – as a permanent reminder that we must never revisit history's darkest hour. It is fitting that we meet here today at the Holocaust Museum and Education Center, which is dedicated to the same mission and in Skokie, a place where so many Holocaust survivors found a new home. We must never forget the lives lost during the Holocaust and we must honor their memory by preventing future genocides."

Forty-five House Members signed a letter in September 2009 to Secretary Clinton urging the U.S. government to contribute to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation.

Other Chicago-area Members of Congress who signed the letter, Representatives Luis V. Gutierrez and Mike Quigley, also attended and spoke at the event held Wednesday morning.

“This summer, I visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial in Poland and saw first-hand a place that witnessed such staggering human suffering and loss of life,” said Rep. Quigley. “I left with a renewed commitment to preserving the memory of what happened inside those walls and I thank the Obama Administration for joining in that effort, one that has great significance to Americans, Jews, and Poles alike.”

"When I heard about the disrepair and the jeopardy facing the Auschwitz-Birkenau site, I wanted to do something," said Rep. Gutierrez, who shepherded the bipartisan House effort. "So I reached out to my colleagues in the House to get a letter to the President and Secretary Clinton. The response was great, especially from my colleagues in Illinois. I think there is a special connection to Poland and special connection to the events of the Holocaust here in the Chicagoland area, so it is fitting and appropriate that the Illinois delegation took the lead."

The letter urging the U.S. government to contribute to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was also signed by Illinois Reps. Daniel Lipinski, Bobby Rush, and Aaron Schock. The letter, addressed to Secretary of State Clinton and dated September 16, 2009, reads in part:

"Too many turned a blind eye to the Nazi's genocide during this dark period in our history. An international symbol of the profound horrors that were committed, Auschwitz-Birkenau was the site of more than 1.1 million murders through systematic starvation, forced labor, individual execution, and gas chambers. The United States must be a leader in the fight against hatred and bigotry by safeguarding an honest record of our history, so that future generations may learn from it. We simply cannot afford to neglect the preservation of this rapidly degrading site."

Secretary Clinton announced the \$15 million grant in July of this year, which will be part of a 120 million Euro endowment for the preservation of the historic site